Study Group - "Buddhist Tenets"

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Please adopt a virtuous motivation for listening to the teaching.

Why do we say at the beginning that we have to generate a virtuous motivation? If we are already a Bodhisattva and have already generated bodhicitta in our mindstream, then there is no need to generate a virtuous motivation, because we will already have that virtuous motivation. However, if we have not yet generated bodhicitta in our mind, then it becomes necessary to generate it now. We do so to purify and change our mind, to increase and develop the positive side, and to purify and lessen the negative side.

Our motivation should not be concerned with the happinesses of this life, taking the teachings in order to become more clever, have less obstacles, sickness etc. Rather, one should direct one's attention towards the future, towards the development of complete enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Just as the listeners have to generate a virtuous motivation for listening to the teaching, so too the person who is teaching the Dharma also has to generate a virtuous motivation for giving the teachings. Vasubandhu said that someone who teaches the Dharma should take care that he does not teach the Dharma out of a negative motivation like pride, attachment, anger and so forth. He should also teach the Dharma exactly as the Buddha taught.

It is important to know about the importance of the motivation with which one is listening to the teachings. Our Dharma practice is preceded by listening to the Dharma, which in turn is preceded by our motivation. Therefore it will make a difference to our Dharma practice if we listen to the Dharma teachings with the right motivation.

4.3 Method of Asserting Objects

4.3.1 Assertions Regarding Objects

With regard to the tenets text, we have finished with the first three divisions of the Sautrantika - definition, divisions and etymology. We are now at the fourth heading, which gives the various divisions of objects of knowledge. Of these we have finished the two truths - the conventional and ultimate truth.

4.3.1.2 Negative And Positive Phenomena[1]

The text next says, 'Again, of existent phenomena there are two, negative phenomena and affirmative phenomena'.

First, in regard to **negative phenomena**, the definition which the text gives is, 'that which has to be realised, by the mind which apprehends it, in the manner of an elimination of its object of negation'. What this means is, first of all, that any kind of existent phenomena has a mind which apprehends it. We talk about a mind which apprehends a particular object. One is talking about a negative if the mind understands that object by way of eliminating the object of negation of the object which is to be understood.

For **affirmative phenomena** it is exactly the opposite. The text defines such phenomena as, 'that which has to be realised, by the mind which apprehends it, in a manner by not eliminating its object of negation'. This is exactly the opposite of negative phenomena.

Within negative phenomena we have two divisions called affirmative-negatives and non-affirmative-negatives.

Non-affirming Negatives

The examples of non-affirming negation given in the text are, non-compounded space, the truth of cessation, and emptiness.

When one gives non-compounded space as an example of a non-affirming negative, it is good to mention that there is a distinction

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[1] 4.3.1.1 was Conventional and Ultimate Truth

between space and non-compounded space. Non-compounded space is what one calls a non-affirming negative. Its object of negation, which has to be negated in order to understand non-compounded space, is obstruction and contact. What one understands under non-compounded space is the mere absence of obstruction and contact. Therefore in order to understand or realise non-compounded space, what one has to eliminate - what one has to realise the absence of - is obstruction and contact. Non-compounded space is understood by eliminating the object of negation, by eliminating or understanding the absence of obstruction and contact.

The definition of **non-compounded space** is the non-affirming negation which is the mere absence of obstruction and contact. We can observe very clearly that if space were not the absence of obstruction and contact, then we could not fly in an aeroplane from one country to another. However because space has this quality of being free of obstruction we can pass through space from one place to another. We can go by a plane from one country to another. Even though slight obstructions like clouds may be encountered high in the sky, they are not enough to stop the plane.

With regard to the second example of non-affirming negation, the **truth of cessation**, the objects of negation are the various afflictive and non-afflictive obscurations. An Arhat is free from afflictive obscurations. The True Cessation in his continuum is a non-affirming negation, which is the absence of afflictive obscurations. A buddha is free from non-afflictive obscurations. The True Cessation in his continuum is a non-affirming negation which is the absence of non-afflictive obscurations.

Here one is talking about a negative phenomenon, the absence of which has to be realised in order to understand this truth of cessation. So this object of negation refers to those various levels of obscurations which are purified from the path of seeing onwards, through the various uninterrupted and liberated paths.

Afflictive obscurations refer to the delusions, and their seeds, in the mindstream. Non-afflictive obscurations refer to the subtle imprints of delusions within the mindstream. The difference between seeds and imprints is that seeds are karmic seeds, which cause the delusions to arise again within our mindstream.

Then there are the mere karmic imprints of the delusions. Even though delusions do not arise in the continuum of an arhat any more, through the imprints of the delusions somehow the mind still sort of gets drawn to various objects of the delusions. Somehow the mind and the body get drawn into engaging into various actions, which were conditioned through those imprints.

The third example of non-affirming-negation is **emptiness.** Actually this is the most important example. What the Sautrantika school of tenets posit as emptiness is the selflessness of person.

The higher schools talk about two kinds of selflessness, the selflessness of person and the selflessness of phenomena, but here only the selflessness of person is accepted. The self which is refuted is the self-supporting, substantially-existent self. Here when one talks about emptiness, it is a non-affirming-negation and the object of negation is a self-supporting, substantially-existent self.

The Sautrantika school does not accept the selflessness of phenomena, rather they posit a self of phenomena. Out of the four major schools of tenets, the two lower schools, the Vaibashika and the Sautrantika, assert a self of phenomena. From the Mind Only school upwards all the tenets accept the selflessness of phenomena.

So why does the Sautrantika school assert that everything that exists is a self of phenomena? What is their mode of asserting the self of phenomena? Geshe-la says that when he debated with the monks in Sera what he used to say was that the Sautrantika school posit a truly existing outer existence. None of the other higher tenets do that. The 'Mind Only' assert true existence but no outer existence. Bavaviveka, a Sautrantika-Svatantrika-Madhyamika, asserts outer existence but no true existence. The Cittamatra-Svatantrika-Madhyamika assert neither outer existence nor true existence, and the Prasangika assert outer existence but again no true existence. The reason why this Sautrantika school does not assert the selflessness of phenomena is because they posit truly existing outer existence. Geshe-la says that this is maybe a useful

thing to keep in mind.

Emptiness and selflessness are synonymous, emptiness and selflessness are both non-affirming negations which are the mere absence of true existence. However the term 'emptiness' does not expressively negate true existence, while the term selflessness expresses directly the absence of the object of negation that it is asserting. Just saying the term 'emptiness' does not negate inherent existence immediately. However when the mind realises emptiness then it does so by negating the object of negation. When we use the term 'selflessness' then the object of negation (being negated by the mind when it realises selflessness) is being refuted expressively. So there is also this slight difference.

Affirming Negation

When we look at the examples of affirming negation the text refers to 'the appearance of the reversal of non-vase to the conception apprehending vase'.

With regard to the difference between a non-affirming-negative and an affirming-negative, when we have a non-affirming-negative like selflessness, the term 'selflessness' does not posit something else in the place of the negation of the objection of negation. When we talk about selflessness the only thing it refers to is the absence of a self. The term 'selflessness' does not try to posit anything in place of that absence of the self. The meaning of a non-affirming negative is 'a negative which is such that the term expressing it does not suggest in place of the negation of its object of negation another affirmative phenomenon'.

The meaning of a affirming negative is 'a negative such that the term expressing it suggests in place of the negation of its own object of negation another, affirmative phenomenon.'

The text talks about the reversal of a non-functioning phenomenon. Here when we talk about the reversal of a non-functioning phenomenon, implicitly it is actually expressing a functioning phenomena. We have a non-functioning phenomenon, so the reverse of that is the opposite, which can only be a functioning phenomenon. That is why this particular kind of negative is called an affirming-negative. In place of the object of negation, non-functioning phenomenon, another affirmative functioning phenomenon is posited.

So functioning phenomenon, and the reversal of a non-functioning phenomenon are synonymous.

The second example of an affirming-negative is, the text says, 'the appearance of the reversal of non-vase to the conception apprehending vase'. What this refers to is that the way a vase appears to the concept is by negating everything which is a non-vase. One negates everything which is a non-vase, and the appearance of the reversal of non-vase becomes the appearing object to the conception apprehending vase.

The conception apprehending a vase has various objects, such as the apprehended object and the appearing object. The apprehended object is 'vase' itself. The appearing object is the appearance of the reversal of non-vase to the conception apprehending vase. This appearing object 'appears' to be the vase but is not actually the vase.

The conception apprehending a vase is mistaken with regards to the appearing object because it mistakes the appearance of the reversal of non-vase to the conception apprehending vase, for the vase. At the same time it is non-mistaken with regards to the apprehended object, which is vase, since it understands 'vase'. 'Vase' itself does also appear to the concept apprehending a vase, but it is not its appearing object. This thought apprehending a vase is mistaken with regard to the appearing object, but it fully comprehends the vase. So it is unmistaken with regard to the apprehended object.

It is said that direct perception, for example the eye consciousness, precedes mental concepts. For example, we first see a vase with our eye consciousness as raw and fresh. There is nothing between the eye consciousness and vase.

The vase appears directly to the eye consciousness. After that our mind, having seen the vase, starts to formulate a mental image and a mental concept. 'Oh, this is a vase.' 'This is how a vase looks like.' When we close our eyes, then we can formulate this mental image of a vase. When we think about it, this mental image of a vase which later appears to our mind is not the actual vase, and nobody would actually posit that it was the vase. However the way our mind works is such that somehow this mental appearance of the vase becomes mixed with the vase. That is why one says that concepts are mistaken with regard to the appearing object. This concludes that point.

4.3.1.3 One and Many

The text says that existent phenomena fall into two divisions, 'one' and 'many'. Then it talks about a false 'one', a true 'one' and so forth.

The meaning of 'many' is different. 'One' means that which is not different.

We can take for example this glass, it is one, what appears to our mind is only one object. However this does not preclude that there can be many different glasses. Something can be one and still have many different instances. But we can also clearly see that glass by itself is only one.

If we take person by itself it is only one, but that does not mean there can not be many instances of person as well. When you think about 'glass', what appears to our mind is only this one object. So that is what is meant when we talk about the definition of 'one' not being different.

Types of 'One'

There is what is called a deceptive or false 'one' and a true 'one'.

The **deceptive** or **false 'one'** refers to conventional or all-obscuring truth. A **true 'one'** refers to one which is ultimate truth. True here refers to ultimate truth.

An example of a deceptive 'one' is 'Object of knowledge' or 'generally characterised phenomena'. Here an object of knowledge is that which is suitable to become the object of mind. Object of knowledge by itself is only 'one', but that does not preclude there being many objects of knowledge. However when we talk about an object of knowledge by itself then it is only one. 'Generally characterised phenomena', or 'abstract' refers to an object which is purely a mental or conceptual elaboration. They are objects which are merely labelled or created by our concepts.

With regard to a true 'one', then we have functioning phenomena, impermanence.

Types of Many

Again we have a false or deceptive many, and a true many. **False** or **deceptive many** refers to conventional truth. **True many** refers to ultimate truth.

We talk of many different phenomena which belong to either of those two categories. With regard to false or deceptive 'many' the example the text gives is both the isolate of a vase and the isolate of a pillar. Both 'the isolate of a vase' and 'the isolate of a pillar' are 'many'. Because they are permanent they are also false. Even though a vase or a pillar by themselves are impermanent phenomena, their isolates are always permanent. So in this school they are categorised as false or conventional phenomena.

Then when we talk about true 'many' the example it gives here is 'both a vase and a pillar'. As one has to take them together, so 'both the vase and the pillar' are many, and they are also ultimate truths. They are impermanent phenomena, so therefore this school regards them as ultimate truths. So the two become a 'true many'.

Then the text says that both the past and the future are permanent, and that the present and all functioning phenomena are synonymous. This school posits that both the past and the future are permanent, and the present is impermanent. In fact the present is synonymous with functioning phenomena.

We are going to stop before the heading concerning object-possessors. We have finished the first four divisions, the definition of a Sautrantika, the divisions and then the explanation of the name Sautrantika. Now we have also finished talking about objects, and the various divisions of objects in this school. The next point will be the explanation of the object-possessors and their divisions.

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